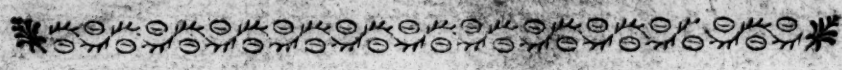
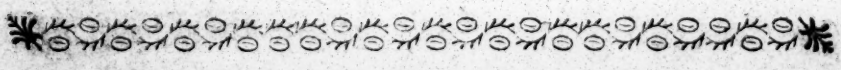


1456

34



AN
ADDRESS
TO THE
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.



A



AN
ADDRESS
TO THE
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,
WHO HAVE LATELY
PETITIONED FOR A REPEAL
OF THE
CORPORATION AND TEST ACTS.

By the Rev. JOSEPH BERINGTON.

Cum tua prævideas oculis mala lippus inundis,
Cur in amicorum vitiis tam cernis acutum,
Quam aut aquila, aut serpens Epidaurius?

Hor.

BIRMINGHAM: PRINTED BY M. SWINNEY:
FOR G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, IN PATER NOSTER-RROW,
AND R. FAULDER, NEW BOND-STREET, LONDON.

MDCCLXXXVII.





A N
A D D R E S S
T O T H E
Protestant Dissenters, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

W H I L E the business was pending,
and you looked anxiously to its
issue, I would not disturb you. Indeed,
that was not a moment for such expostu-
lations as I had to make, and probably you
would not have listened to me. Other
thoughts, and those of a very interesting
nature, engaged your attention. But now
when parliament has rejected your appli-
cation, and disappointment (for disap-
pointment surely you have felt) has
checked the effervescence of your
B minds,

minds, an individual, unconnected with party, and himself oppressed, may, he presumes, claim a momentary hearing from you, and find it.

I can say with truth that I was pleased, when I heard of your design of petitioning parliament for a further redress of grievances. Men of little delicacy of conscience might talk lightly of grievances, which they said, the greatest part of you did not feel, and which demanded but a moderate pliancy of disposition to surmount; but you surely were the best judges of their real extent and pressure. The mind of an Englishman does not easily bend to the smallest oppression; and and if you felt yourselves aggrieved by the obnoxious acts, you complained of, it will not be said, that you might not ask for their repeal, knowing what it is to suffer for conscience sake, I have learned to sympathise in the sufferings of others. I therefore, and the body of men to which I belong, wished you success in your application.

But

But my benevolence, I own, soon received a severe shock. Your printed *case*, designed for the instruction of the members of both houses, and purposely circulated through the country, was put into my hands. I read it. Many things pleased me much ; but there were a few clauses so illiberal, and so unfounded, that my mind recoiled with horror. I could hardly persuade myself to believe that men of information, of policy, of religion, of improved virtue, could be so inconsistent, as even then to profess *intolerance*, when they complained of its injustice, and wished to remove its galling influence from themselves. You have done worse than this. You have thrown out *insinuations*; at once *false* and *malevolent*, when the object of them merited no such treatment from you. Do you think your cause called for that support?

Gentlemen! the charges I bring against you are severe and solemn: it is therefore incumbent on me to prove their truth.

The *corporation* and *test acts* were the two statutes, of which you complained.—By the first, enacted in the year 1661, the 13th of Charles II, it is provided, “That no person or persons, shall for ever hereafter be placed, elected, or chosen in, or to, any corporation-offices, that shall not have, within one year before such election, or choice, taken the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, according to the rites of the church of *England*.”—By the *test act*, made in 1672, the 25th of the same reign it is enacted, “That all and every person or persons, that shall be admitted, entered, placed, or taken, into any office, or offices, civil, or military, or shall receive any pay, salary, fee, or wages, by reason of any patent or grant of his majesty, or shall have command or place of trust from or under his majesty, his heirs or successors, or by his or their authority, or by authority derived from him or them, within this realm of England, dominion of Wales, or town of Berwick upon Tweed, or in his majesty’s navy, or in the
several

several islands of Jersey and Guernsey, or that shall be admitted into any service or employment in his majesty's household or family, — shall receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of the church of *England*, within three months after his or their admittance in, or receiving their said authority and employment, in some public church, upon the Lord's day commonly called Sunday, immediately after divine service."

You briefly relate the circumstances in which these acts passed, and I cannot say they are mistated. That, regarding corporations, you observe, passed in a period of great heat and violence, the year after the restoration, and *probably*, you say, was designed against *some* of the protestant dissenters. How gently is this expressed! The fact, as our historians you well know, relate it, was—The king, with his ministers, and the majority in both houses, hated the presbyterians, whom they considered as the authors of the late rebellion.

In their hands remained still great power, for, during the protectorate, they had been appointed magistrates in all the country towns. To leave authority in such hands seemed dangerous; it was therefore judged expedient to regulate the corporations, and to expel those magistrates, whose principles were inimical to the constitution civil and ecclesiastical. This gave rise to the *corporation-act*.—It was besides rumoured that new plots were forming in the state, and they obviously would be marked for the authors, whom long practice had rendered expert in the business. The nation and parliament were alarmed, and a committee was appointed to inquire into the affair, that measures might be taken to secure the peace of the nation. It was judged expedient to frame the *act* in question. Could men of a disaffected and dangerous spirit be kept out of offices, their power of doing mischief would be abridged. There was little truth, I believe, in these reports, but it answered the designs of the

the

the court-party, and paved the way for the *act of uniformity*, which soon after passed.

To be so very guarded, therefore, in your expressions, was too punctilious. *Probably*, you say, the act was designed against *some* of your ancestors. Indeed, Gentlemen, it was obviously designed against the whole family, though every branch might not have equally deserved it. Why should truth be with-held?

Your forefathers, it is true, were guilty of great excesses. But in those excesses I can trace the gracious designs of Providence towards England. Its political humours were foul, and of that obstinate nature, which only violent medicines could remove. These you applied with a bold hand. The patient had strength of constitution to bear it, and we have to thank you for our present health. The liberty we enjoy, and the blessings of our well-poised government are certainly due to the exertions of your ancestors. So it is by
forms

storms and tempests that our atmosphere is often cleared from noxious vapours, which otherwise might spread pestilence and death through the land. The mariner indeed who is buried in the waves, or the landman who sees his harvest lost, looks only to the evil, and laments his cruel fate; while minds more composed and penetrating see through the veil, and adore in the whirlwind the beneficent hand of God.

I think then you might have fairly owned that the *Corporation act* was *wholly* designed against you. Your claim to present indulgence would not have been weakened by the concession; for how culpable soever the old stock might have been, you, their children, men of a new bone and spirit, could have nothing to apprehend from the most jealous government. Your loyalty, your patriotism, your respect for the laws, your manly exertions, your love of virtue, and your zeal for religion were all conspicuous.

In

In stating the circumstances, wherein the *test act* passed, you have not been so reserved. “ It, you apprehend, was *wholly* made against Papists, and not to prevent any danger which could happen to the nation or church from the Dissenters.”—The *established church*, it is well known, could, at no time, have any thing to fear from you ; therefore such precaution must have been useless. Against *us* the whole weight of the statute was aimed, and you detail the circumstances of the time with apparent complacency.—We acknowledge the *truth* of your assertion; but, in these times of more generous humanity, would it have argued a degeneracy of character had you softened the harsh statement, by some qualifying clause. You might have said that the bill passed, as the former against you did, in a period of *great heat* and *violence* ; or that the Papists, perhaps, were not so culpable, as the rage of party represented them. How stern is the selfish eye in the view of every other interest but its own!

The

The *test act* passed in 1672, or rather the year after.—Since the year 1670, the nation had been justly alarmed. The counsels of the *cabal*-ministry then began to prevail, and never had power been committed to the hands of more dangerous men. These were Clifford, Ashley, Buckingham, Arlington and Lauderdale. Clifford was a Roman catholic, and in great favour with the king: Ashley, soon after earl of Shaftesbury, a believer in no religion, had successively joined every party, and in every party had taken the lead; he had served Cromwell, and his influence with the *presbyterians* was well known: Buckingham, a light and airy noble man, had too little reflection to embrace any steady principles in religion or politics: Arlington, secretly attached to the faith of Rome, and in which he died, was not remarkable for his vices or talents: “Lauderdale,” says Mr. Hume, “had long, been a bigotted and furious *presbyterian*, and the opinions of that sect still kept possession of his mind, how little

little soever they appeared in his conduct."

Such were the men, who held the reins of government. Their dark designs were not at once visible; but it soon appeared that they meant to make the king absolute, and to enslave the people. They proposed an alliance with France, and war with Holland. From the first, they said, subsidies might be drawn; and were Holland subdued, it might serve to curb that romantic spirit of liberty and independence, which seemed to derive energy from contemplating the fame and grandeur of a proud republic.—An alliance with France was soon after formed, one article of which is said to have regarded the establishment of the catholic religion. But in this the king was not serious: he only aimed to get money. If the ministers meant it, surely Clifford and Arlington were the least blameable of the junto.

In

In the month of March, 1671, died the duchess of York, daughter of the earl of Clarendon, and in her last sickness she declared her belief in the catholic religion. This was the prelude to a more important step. The duke, who had long been a secret member of that church, now threw aside all disguise, and openly announced his conversion. The new alliance with France, it is thought, inspired him with this sudden courage, and rendered him less solicitous of the affections of the English people.—Worldly prudence might arraign the measure; but if James was conscientiously convinced of the truth of the religion he embraced, his conduct must be termed disinterested and noble. He could not be actuated by any ungenerous motive.

“ Unaccountable terrors of popery, says Mr. Hume, ever since the accession of the house of Stuart, had prevailed throughout the nation; but these had formerly been found so groundless, and
had

had been employed to so many bad purposes, that surmises of this nature were likely to meet with the less credit amongst all men of sense; and nothing but the duke's imprudent bigotry could have convinced the whole nation of his change of religion. Popery, which had hitherto been only a hideous spectre, was now become a real ground of terror, being openly and zealously embraced by the heir to the crown, a prince of industry and enterprise; while the king himself was not entirely free from like suspicions."

In 1672, as money was wanting to carry on the military preparations against Holland, and Charles would not assemble his parliament, whose just indignation he dreaded, other means were to be resorted to. Clifford dared to advise the shutting up the Exchequer, and retaining all the payments, which should be made into it. In reward for this service he received the staff of treasurer, and a peerage.—A general confusion prevailed in the city,
fol-

followed by the ruin of many. The bankers stopped payment; the merchants could answer no bills; distrust took place every where, with a stagnation of commerce, by which the public was universally affected.

To conciliate the good-will of one part of his subjects, the king was disposed to try an expedient, which he had before attempted. By virtue of an authority, which he said, was inherent in him, and recognized by several acts of parliament, he issued a proclamation, suspending the penal laws, enacted against all nonconformists, or recusants whatsoever. To the *Protestant Dissenters*, he granted the *public* exercise of their religion, and to the *Catholics* the exercise of it in *private* houses. Thus the dissenters, observes Mr. Hume, the inveterate enemies to the court, were mollified; while the catholics enjoyed more liberty than the laws had hitherto allowed them.

But

But this proclamation, you say, was, made *chiefly in favour of papists*. The king, I know, loved us better than he'd id you ; and he had reason for it. You he feared ; and it was his maxim to court his enemies. However, the *advantage* of the proclamation certainly was on your side.

On the 4th of February, 1673 , after prorogations continued for near two years, Charles met his parliament. He addressed them with cordiality and confidence : “ A few days, said he, before I declared war, I put forth my declaration for indulgence to dissenters ; and I have hitherto found a good effect of it, by securing peace at home, when I had war abroad. There is one part of it, that has been subject to misconstruction ; which is that concerning the papists ; as if more liberty were granted to them, than to other recusants, when it is plain there is less. For the others have public places allowed them, and I never intended that they should

should have any ; but only have the freedom of their religion in their own houses, without the concourse of others. And I could not grant them less than this, when I had extended so much more grace to others, *most of them* having been loyal, and in the service of me, and of the king my father ; and in the whole course of this indulgence, I do not intend, that it shall any way prejudice the church ; but I will support its right in its full power."

This language was sensible and manly ; but parliament was not in a humour to be easily managed. Of the grievances they complained of, none was so alarming as the declaration of indulgence. It struck at the very life of the constitution, and established a power, absolute and uncontrollable. Against the exercise of such a power, they remonstrated. The king defended the measure ; nor did it seem that he would recede from the extravagant pretension : the commons, however, persisted. It was a crisis of great importance.

ance. Charles again reviewed his resources, and he numbered the combined forces which opposed him: He saw the precipice, on which he stood. His own character also, naturally pliant and careless, came in aid of the advice which prudence suggested to him. To yield with the better grace, he asked the opinion of the peers: they advised compliance. The king then sent for the declaration, and with his own hands broke the seals. This step gave the utmost satisfaction, and the commons expressed their warmest duty to his majesty. In this moment of mutual goodwill, Charles assured them, that he would readily pass any law, they might offer, tending to dispel their suspicions, and to remove grievances.

Many of the dissenters, I believe, sided on this occasion, with the opposition. Among these was the alderman Love, you mention. Either they condemned the arbitrary measures which produced the declaration; or they found little satis-

C

faction

faction in the enjoyment of an indulgence, of which the catholic party was at the same time allowed to partake. Such a wayward disposition has been sometimes known to exist.

Parliament, though apparently satisfied with the king's compliance, was not willing to let the occasion pass without marking their strongest disapprobation of measures, which, it seemed, the court had pursued with much ardour. They would mortify the duke of York in his new religion; they would give the king to understand that neither his own favourite ministers, of the catholic persuasion, nor his brother's creatures, should have it in their power to execute their designs without molestation; and they would tell the whole catholic body, if, as some reported, they relied on any foreign aid for the establishment of their religion, that they should find an obstacle at home which would check their most sanguine

fanguine endeavours. The *test act* was prepared, and it passed into a law.

I allow then that this act was *chiefly* levelled against the roman catholics. Indeed its preamble declares it. But I have been thus minute in detailing the principal circumstances of the times, that you may see, that they were not less a period of *heat* and *violence*, than that in which the *corporation-act* was made. In the nation, besides, and particularly in parliament, it must appear, there was a great disposition to curb the dissenters, whose steps were watched, and whose general views were suspected. Nor can it be doubted, though they are not named in the act, that the *test* was designed against every description of nonconformists. In the lower house all the old loyalists were their avowed enemies, without counting the king's new favourites, who were numerous: Among the lords, few even of the laypeers could be their friends; and I need not, I think, mention the dis-

positions of the bishops, and of the whole established clergy out of doors. Men thus affected to the dissenters, would even more ardently adopt a scheme, which, under the shew of galling the roman catholics, would fall with equal weight on their enemies.—Allowing this to have been the case, are your present pretensions less founded and cogent?

In our justification I wish it also to be observed, that, though the act was designed against the catholics, yet that few, even then, of the number, merited a treatment so severe. They had no concern in the views of Charles or his brother, in the schemes of wild ministers, or in the machinations of bad politicians. They had suffered much in the royal cause, and were pining in penury and distress, under the additional pressure of cruel laws. Had they most distantly approved the measures, unconstitutional and dishonourable as they were, by which it was pretended, their friends aimed to redress

redress their grievances, I am ready to admit that the test-act was a just curb to their desires. Nor am I so blind a partisan as not to allow that the act itself was wisely planned, considering the apprehensions entertained by many, that men then existed, who, to establish their religion, would not hesitate to overthrow the constitution. Could these men have been marked, and the community have been spared, it would have been a measure more just and laudable: But the innocent must sometimes suffer with the guilty.

Gentlemen, is it not better we should both lose sight of those days of heat and violence? Your conduct had been often censurable, and so had ours; but not in the same degree. Our political principles had both swerved; yours in favour of republicanism, ours of monarchy. We would have gone great lengths to have established our religion; you did establish yours, while the crown and mitre lay

trodden on the earth. I know not which is the worst form of government, absolute monarchy, or pure democracy: but I know that any set of men, who, in this country, should aim to establish either, would merit to be curbed by the severest laws. From the excesses of our progenitors we have both learned wisdom: let us then rejoice rather in our reformation, forget what is passed, and be friends.

I therefore condemn the general idea, which seems to run through the historical part of your printed *case*. You wish to hold us out as the only obnoxious party; as if in the proportion we shall appear guilty, your innocence will be prominent. Could not your cause rest on its own merit? The two statutes aggrieved you. That was enough. And your present principles and conduct, instead of restraints called for encouragement and praise. He who, to enhance his own pretensions, wantonly attacks his neighbour's fame,

fame, leads me involuntarily to suspect that,

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

The account you give of the steps, which, at different periods, have been taken in parliament to procure you some relief from these oppressive laws, none of which were crowned with success, proves indeed that you had friends; but does it not also prove that your friends were out-numbered by your enemies? There is a comfort, however, in the reflection, that virtue, on this unjust earth, does not always find admirers, or the rewards it merits. We papists solace ourselves wonderfully in the reflection.

I shall now consider, as far as it regards my purpose, the general *reasons* you adduce, which, you think, should operate a repeal of the obnoxious *acts*.

I.—“ Every man, as it is now universally
 “ acknowledged, has an undoubted right
 “ to judge for himself in matters of re-
 “ ligion ;

“ ligion; nor ought his exercise of this
 “ right to be branded with a mark of in-
 “ famy.”

To this position I most cordially subscribe. It is founded on the clearest deductions of reason, and all the spirit of christianity tends to give it efficacy. Let it operate then in its universal extent. To admit general principles in theory, and to restrict them in practice, is, in a rational mind, the basest logic. Intolerance, that pretends to reason, is, in my eyes, worse than enthusiasm which persecutes from impulse. *Every man* has a right to judge for himself in matters of religion, you say. The only question then must be, whether Peter, or John, or Paul be *men*. You and I are men; so is the Jew, so is the mahometan.

“ Nor ought his exercise of this right
 “ to be branded with a mark of infamy.”
 —Clearly it should not. As well give reason to man, and brand him for a *fool* because

cause he reasons. The absurdity is too glaring. Yet are you, and we, and all churches guilty of this absurdity ; we wish to fasten some opprobrium on one another. In this kingdom, all, who are not of the establishment, are branded ; but the mark on us is the most broad and flagrant. We do not merit it, however. And have not you yourselves, in the very publication I am examining, sinned against your own doctrine ? Prejudice is too often an overmatch for principle.

II. “ The holy Sacrament of the Lord’s
 “ Supper, being a matter purely of a religious nature, and being appointed by
 “ our blessed Saviour only for the remembrance of his death, ought not to be
 “ applied to the secular ends of civil societies.”

Nor should this position be controverted. Do you only allow that it applies to our situation, as well to your own.—It may appear strange, that men should
 have

have confounded things so evidently distinct, as are religion and politics: but as long as states shall adopt the antichristian maxim of supporting exclusively some favourite sect, so long must the confusion last; and divine and human, sacred and profane, temporal and eternal, earth and heaven, must be moulded into one heap, and the chaotic mass shall be called *pure christianity*.—Were you in power, would a proper discrimination, think you, be made; and would order once more exhibit the charming features of sacred truth? Were we in power, it would not, I know, be done. While then we are so kindly solicitous to take the *splinter* out of our brother's eye, let us not forget that perhaps there is a *beam* in our own.

III.—“ As dissenters are universally
 “ acknowledged to be well-affected to his
 “ majesty and the established government,
 “ and are ready to take the oaths required by law, and to give the fullest
 “ proof of their loyalty, they think it
 “ hard

“ hard that their scruple to receive the
“ sacrament after the manner of the
“ church of England, or after the man-
“ ner of *any* church, as a qualification
“ for an office, should render them inca-
“ pable of holding public employments,
“ civil or military.”

This, gentlemen, is also our complaint.
As you, we are acknowledged, and I trust
universally, to be well-affected to his ma-
jesty and the established government;
with you we are ready to give the fullest
proof of our loyalty, only we are not
ready to take *all* the oaths required by
law; and with you we think it hard
that our scruple to receive the sacra-
ment in the church of England, should
exclude us from the common rights of
citizens.

You know the oaths we refuse to take,
and as the subject of them is as much of
a *religious* nature, as the sacrament itself
of the Lord's Supper, *your reasoning* against
taking

taking the latter must apply with equal force to them. We are required by those oaths, to renounce the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, to declare that the *invocation* of saints, and the *sacrament of the mass*, are *superstitious* and *idolatrous*, and that he, whom we consider as the *head* of our church, has no *spiritual pre-eminence* over us. Can there be doctrines of a more abstracted nature than these, or with which states, it seems, should have less concern?

Were you truly *consistent*, yourselves would refuse to take these oaths. You would scruple to take the sacrament, with a view to a civil qualification, even in your own church. How then, agreeably with this declaration, can you renounce on oath the doctrine of transubstantiation, to qualify yourselves, it being evidently of a religious nature? It is not the truth or *falsehood*, of doctrines at which you hesitate, so much as at the incongruity of adapting religion to the secular ends of society.

IV.—“ The

IV.—“ The occasional receiving of the
 “ Lord’s Supper, as a qualification for a
 “ place, cannot, in the nature of things,
 “ imply, that those who thus receive it,
 “ mean to declare their full and entire
 “ approbation of the whole constitution
 “ and frame of the established church ;
 “ since men may be compelled by their
 “ necessities, or allured by secular advantages,
 “ to do what they would not do,
 “ were they left to their free choice. As
 “ from these motives, persons may be induced
 “ to conform to the established
 “ church in this particular instance,
 “ though they do not approve of its
 “ forms and ceremonies in general, so,
 “ from the same motives, others may
 “ comply with the sacramental test who
 “ are not even christians, and who therefore
 “ cannot be supposed to wish well
 “ to christianity itself, or to any national
 “ establishment of it whatsoever.
 “ Hence it is apparent, that such a test
 “ can be no real or effectual security to
 “ the church of England. *It is also apprehended,*

“ *prehended, that, independently of any re-*
 “ *marks upon the doctrine of papal dispensa-*
 “ *tions, the sacramental test complained of*
 “ *may be received by many papists, because*
 “ *many of them hold the church of England*
 “ *to be no church, her ministers no ministers,*
 “ *and her sacraments to be no sacraments.*”

The last lines marked in italics, are the
 passage, at which, I said, my mind recoiled,
 and to that I alluded when I talked of
 insinuations, *false and malevolent*. Its in-
 duction also was wanton, for without it,
 the general reasoning was full and con-
 clusive.

Nor is it I only, or those of my per-
 suasion, whom this ungenerous clause has
 offended. Men of all religions, with
 whom I have conversed, and some of your
 own people, have expressed their utter
 disapprobation of it. I have conversed,
 indeed, only with men of liberal minds;
 and as long as I am permitted to chuse
 my own company, I will associate with no
 others.

others. When they cease to be found, it will be time to retire to the woods.— One of your brightest ornaments, a man who does honour to human nature, and in whom his country may be proud, thus expresses himself:—"What I dislike in the printed case is the conclusion of article 4, which contains a very unjust insinuation against the catholics, none of whom, I believe, can be proved to have received the sacrament at the church of England; and therefore it ought not to be said that they *might* do it. Themselves know this best; and their conduct proves, that they do not think it right to do it, whatever advantages they might secure by a compliance with it."

"Independently of any remarks upon the doctrine of papal dispensations."— Do you then really think that we admit such doctrine? Ever since it was first objected to us, (and it was first objected, when he was esteemed the best christian, who could address his adversary in the foulest

foulest language), we have uniformly reprobated the calumny. We give no such dispensing power to any man. And in the oath of *allegiance*, lately prepared for us, do not we disclaim the position in terms the most full and unequivocal? There is in some minds, it seems, an inveteracy of suspicion which nothing can eradicate. True it is; we do not organize ourselves, and happy are they on whom nature smiled propitious in their birth.

But as if the charge of *knavery* were not sufficient, we must also be made *fools* in this business. It is asserted that, we admit a power which can *dispense* with our most solemn obligations. Why then have we not availed ourselves of it? For more than two centuries, we have suffered ourselves to be exposed to persecuting laws, and to feel all their weight, while you tell us, we had an instrument in our hands which could have broken our fetters at a blow. The prison door was open, and we refused to go out. No, gentlemen,

gentlemen, such folly is never found in man. What stronger proof then can you require of our not believing in such a *dispensing* power, than that of our never having used it, when every motive, which can influence the human heart, must have urged us to it?

Had the insinuation come from a vulgar quarter, I could but have despised it, as I have often done; but as it comes from you, I feel a swell of indignation in me, which is a proof, I trust, of an honest heart.

You also apprehend, “ that the sacramental test *may* be received by *many* papists, because *many* of them hold the church of England to be no church, her ministers no ministers, and her sacraments no sacraments.”

Before you laid your apprehension, thus openly before the public, that we *might* receive the sacramental test, it

D

would

would have been prudent to have enquired whether any of us *had done it*, or whether we ourselves thought it *lawful* so to do. The information would have been easily procured. I will tell you then; no Catholic ever has taken the test, nor can he with a safe conscience.

Your casuistry in this matter is curious.
 “ *Many* papists *may* do it you say, because
 “ *many* of them hold the church of Eng-
 “ land to be no church, her ministers
 “ no ministers, and her sacraments no
 “ sacraments.”—You need not have limited your expression. We *all* hold the church of England to be no church; if by *church* you understand a society of true believers founded by Christ and his apostles.—We *all* hold her ministers to be no ministers; because we conceive they have not their mission from Christ, or that they do not succeed to those who were immediately sent by him.—But we *none* of us hold her *sacraments* to be no sacraments; because her *baptism* we admit

mit to be as valid as our own; though we reject her sacrament of the Lord's supper, as unscriptural, and unsupported by the belief of antiquity. Such is our belief. Yet we refuse to take the sacramental test, because it would be the profanation of a rite which by all men is deemed holy, and it would be the public declaration of belief in a religion, which the conscience at the same time rejected. Even the framers of the act, who were our enemies, thought too well of our sincerity to imagine it could be warped by such weak casuistry as you have suggested.

Now, gentlemen, let me examine your consciences. Why do not you take the test on the strength of this same casuistry? You hold the church of England to be no church; otherwise why do you *dissent* from her? Her ministers to be no ministers, as the history of *presbyterianism* can demonstrate; and her sacraments to be

no sacraments; or why do you scruple to take the holy bread from her hand?

As you seem disposed to think us capable of acting with great *duplicity* in this business, either by virtue of papal *dispensations*, which yourselves have conjured up, or by casuistical *evasions*, of which also yourselves are the authors, a man, less moderate than myself, might be inclined to retaliate. He would bring before you those times when the doctrine of *occasional conformity* was so much agitated among you, and when many availed themselves of it to retain, or to accept, benefices in the church, idly arguing that the *outward man* might conform, whilst the *inward man* remained true and immaculate. But such retaliation only serves to irritate, when every effort should be exerted to close the breaches which former animosities have made, and to diffuse a wider stream of general benevolence.

One circumstance, however, is so prominent, that I cannot pass it by. Look
through

through the army, the navy, the civil offices, and all places of command and trust, throughout his majesty's dominions, and you will find protestant dissenters in them all. For this they must have taken the qualifying sacramental test. In similar stations no roman catholics will be found; unless perhaps a few who, by some interest, have evaded the test, or if they have taken it, will be considered as having renounced their religion. Owing to this fatal statute it is, that our young men of family are driven from their native country, to earn a scanty livelihood under some foreign standard. I blame not men of your persuasion, if their consciences can bend to it, for conforming to what the laws direct; I only mean to observe how hard it is that we should suffer so severely, and should at the same time be charged with an hypocritical conformity, as if our consciences were pliant as a glove, or as if we fattened in the sunshine of ease, office, and preferment.

5.—“ The oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and the declaration against transubstantiation, have without the sacramental test, been found *effectual* for more than a century to exclude papists from both houses of parliament.”

Reconcile this, gentlemen, if you can, with your insinuation about papal dispensations. These oaths, you observe, have been found *effectual*, for more than a century, to exclude us from parliament. And would not *dispensations* from Rome have applied equally to them, as to the test, had we believed in their efficacy? Or do you think us so ignorant as, in more than a century, not to have discovered that the cases were parallel? Surely there is something strangely inconsistent in this style of argument; but I fear I can account for it. In speaking of the test, the repeal of which you meditated, it was your interest to shew that its operation was chiefly felt by yourselves, as even the papists had the art to evade

evade it. But as you foresaw that, notwithstanding your insinuation, it might still be urged by many, that its repeal would give a freer ingress to papists to offices, &c. No, say you, that cannot be, for the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and the declaration against transubstantiation will remain in full force against them, and these oaths alone, without the sacramental test, have been long found *effectual* to exclude them from both houses. The insinuation of papal dispensations here would evidently have overturned your reasoning.

Will you believe me, gentlemen, when I say that it is with real pain I dwell on these things? But it would have been culpable in me, when I was engaged in stating my objections to your *case*, not to have noticed such ungenerous insinuations against us, such evident misrepresentations of our real situation, and such palpable incoherence of argument.

On

On the remaining part of this *case* I have nothing to say: It has no reference to us, and its general reasoning is weighty and conclusive. One idea there is, often repeated, which, I think, must have made most of your readers smile. You wish to persuade them, that you are very sincere in your professions of good-will to the *church*. This, indeed, may be; but it will not at once be admitted. It does not harmonize with many declarations, almost daily renewed, by many of your friends in other quarters. We have heard of gunpowder, begun to be laid under the old walls, grain by grain, which, in its proper season, will explode, and produce the desired effect. The skill and perseverance of your chief engineer are well known. We have heard also of predictions, uttered with almost inspired confidence, of the approaching downfall of this second anti-christian church. Serious and well-directed efforts are practised to second these assertions. The cordiality therefore of your
kind

kind professions may, perhaps, be suspected.

It would be idle in me to say, that I do not view with pleasure these attacks on the established church. For besides that I am an enemy to all ecclesiastical establishments, which the secular arm supports; it is bringing home to their own doors that war, which they once so successfully waged against us. They dispossessed us of our inheritance, and they fatten in our seats. Ages must sometimes elapse, before a conquered people can cheerfully bend their necks to the laws of the victor. Besides, the principles on which you ground your opposition are so congenial with the spirit of your boasted reformation, that I know not with what semblance of consistency, they can be rejected by rational protestants. I wish to see all restraints removed, which have been laid in the way of free discussion, and religious truths resting solely on their own internal strength. It is a poor compliment

pliment to any religion, to suppose that it wants the aid of secular indulgence or of penal statutes.

I have not distinctly heard the objections, which were made to your *petition* in the house of commons; but I understand they chiefly ran on the beaten ground of the danger of innovation in the best of all possible constitutions in church and state. I believe certain doctrines were also hinted at, which, should they again warm the bosoms of dissenters, danger, they said, might be carried even into the political constitution of the state. Such apprehensions are, I dare say, groundless; and had our ancestors permitted them to operate as effectually on their minds, the reformation at least, which these politicians affect to regard as so signal a blessing, never could have been established. I know not why *optimism*, speaking of England, should rather be admitted in politics, than in the moral system of things. Every thing that is human
is

is imperfect; and the paltry notion which, circumscribing the view, fixes it on an imaginary excellence, will be an eternal bar to improvement. The general arrangements in church and state can surely be meliorated, or the circumstances of England must be peculiar indeed. What I said of the *reformation* may be applied to the *revolution*. Why were not our forefathers authorised to regard their constitution as the best, for they knew none better? And had the maxim been steadily adhered to, the yoke of despotism might at this hour, have galled our necks.

The penal statutes, of which you and we complain, were made at a time, when real or imaginary danger seemed to call for their enactment. It is universally allowed that no such danger now exists. Shall the son then be visited for the sins of his father to the third and fourth generation? This is vindictive justice with a witness! No crime is committed; but penalties endure. *Salus populi suprema lex,*
has

has ever been admitted as the great basis of legislations: In our regard the order is subverted, and to punish even the unoffending citizen becomes the object of the law.

Gnossius hæc Rhadamanthus habet durissima regna.

VIRG.

It was once my wish that you, and we, and every British subject, who, for conscience sake, felt themselves aggrieved, should have united in a common petition to Parliament. Such a coalition of interests would, I think, have done us honor; and had no other good been produced, the measure at least might have removed prejudices, and have made us better friends. But to judge from your present declaration of sentiments, the day is yet distant, when we may hope to realize so desirable a plan. We are the elder branch of the family, and as it would have become us, so, I think, we should have been earnest to have set the example of brotherly love. Your consequence,

we

we well know, could have given weight to our just petitions: In that we were interested. But also we are too conscious of our own real deserts, as men and as citizens, to think that our alliance would have dishonoured you. The blood which warms our veins, I once said, is almost as ancient as the hoary cliffs, that surround our island; and our sentiments, I trust, have not degenerated from those of our ancestors.

It is easy to account for the prejudices which, in this country, were originally taken up against us, for they date from the reformation; and I can trace their progress through sham plots, political devices, and popular rumours, for a long series of years. But from the revolution, though the piece still continued in the loom, I am rather surprised that hands could be found to work it. The mind then opened to large views: Commerce, agriculture, and successively the arts of war and peace so much engrossed general
attention,

attention, that bigotry should have died away, and party-prejudice should have expired with it. It did not so happen; for bigotry still lives: prejudices flourish; and the constitution of intolerance seems almost as vigorous as ever.

Will you accuse me, gentlemen, of a culpable partiality, when I declare it as my opinion, that the English Catholics are the freest from rancour, from prepossession, and from religious antipathies, of any general society in the realm. I own, I may view them with too indulgent an eye, though hitherto I have not been suspected of it. Suppose the case to be true, and account for it: or do not account of it; it is not therefore less true, and it does us honour. Shall it be, perhaps, that the mild treatment of our country has weakened every acrid humour, and given nourishment only to those which may generate benevolence and candour.

Had

Had you not been disposed to have joined us, to which you were free, and to which many of you might have objected, still, why were hostilities to be commenced against us? Your printed *case* certainly seems to breathe this spirit. I pretend not that peace was before declared; but the character of the times appeared to have signed preliminaries, from which we augured great success. We had been labouring to still the animosity, which, from idle preconceptions, hung on the minds of the multitude; when you, the great body of the Dissenters, men of wisdom and sound policy, step forward to stem the progress of benevolence, and to reanimate low prejudice and the rancour of misjudging zeal. I shall be told that nothing of the kind was meant: What then did you mean? The illiberal sheet was carried from hand to hand; and it has been consigned, with peculiar diligence, to the best repositories of records, *in perpetuam rei memoriam*.

I there-

I therefore rejoice in your defeat. Had you succeeded, it would but have strengthened prejudices, and supplied fresh matter of triumph to the enemies of *real toleration*.

Since, in the year 1778, we obtained the small indulgence which government thought proper to bestow, our conduct has uniformly shewn that we deserved it. It has, in truth, shewn that we deserved a great deal more. The step then taken was meant as a prelude to many more ; but we at first only asked for little, and since that have remained silent, that a pause might be made, during which our friends might see how much we merited a continuance of their protection, and that our enemies might see, how unjust were their prejudices, and how groundless the apprehensions conceived against us. The time then, I trust, is fast approaching, when parliament will be again petitioned to take up our cause on a much wider scale than before, and to grant

grant us a redress of every grievance. This we wish the public to know. It is not our design to take them by surprise: let our friends and enemies view our conduct, with what minuteness they please; let them scrutinize our principles with the most guarded caution. This we challenge; and as far as may be, we will bare our bosoms to their inspection.

The propriety of granting, what was called a *complete toleration*, to men of all persuasions, seems to have been very generally admitted even by those, who opposed your petition, in the house of commons. Such toleration would give some ease, as it would remove restraints from the practice of religion; but how it can be termed *complete*, is not readily understood. Men must have bounded conceptions of *liberty* indeed, who can persuade themselves, that dissenters from the established church have no just claim to any toleration, but that which barely regards their religious belief. My claim to an *equal* participa-

E

tion

tion of all the rights of a British subject is paramount to every distinction, which a partial and unjust policy may have introduced; and he who abridges, or deprives me of, that right, is a *persecutor*, however highly he may talk of toleration, or extol the wonders of his liberal mind. A Spanish inquisitor, while the victim burns at the stake, talks even then of philanthropy, and throws from him the name of a persecutor.

I have heard it even maintained that we Roman Catholics, in our present situation, are not persecuted on account of our religious tenets: That the oaths and tests, of which we complain, are only meant as an *ordeal*, by which government may discover who are well-affected, and who are fit to be entrusted with power. Let us then allow as before observed, that there was a time, when our political principles were justly suspected, and that then the enactment of such laws was wise. Is there now any ground for such suspicion?

Is

Is it not rather universally granted that no men are better affected to the present civil constitution than ourselves? This being the case, what can justify the execution of these statutes; when the very motive, which alone, in the first instance, could lawfully produce them, is allowed to subsist no longer? With the same equity might our former governors have introduced prohibitory acts, though no just occasion had ever been given, and have defended, by the same reasoning, the propriety of the measure.

However, let government first grant us what they please to call a *complete toleration*, (and I hope they will do it unsolicited to give more value to the present) that is, the free and public practice of our religion, with permission to educate our children at home; and we may be disposed to wait, till some favourable concurrence of circumstances shall give both to you and us a general release from all other restraints. It is not possible that this period

be very distant. The doctrine of toleration, which is making its way, in all parts of Europe, in spite of the obstacles which established churches, and bigoted societies, daily oppose to its progress, must finally succeed; and the business will be done. Then, I think, it will appear that this boasted *alliance* between church and state, about which so many high-sounding words have been uttered, was founded on a misconception of things, and a palpable confusion of ideas, in themselves as distinct, as earth is from heaven. The evils, this system has occasioned, will then also be lamented; and it will be well if it shall not be too late to apply a remedy.

I have said, gentlemen, what I principally wish to suggest to you. It may help, perhaps, to remove some prejudices from your own minds, or, at all events, it may obstruct the spread of that impression, which, the general import, and the clauses I noticed, in your printed
case,

case, were calculated to make. I should be sorry to impute a motive to you, which I had rashly assumed; but certainly the tendency of your expressions was such as could not be mistaken. In a long work, an author, through inadvertence, may sometimes let words fall from him, which should be construed with indulgence. In a single sheet, where every expression is weighed, and whereby it is designed to convey the most precise and unequivocal ideas, even critical severity is put to defiance. I therefore inferred that you meant, Parliament and the public should understand, that, though you petitioned for a redress of grievances for yourselves, it was not your wish the same indulgence should be extended to others. On this ground, you aimed to shew that you only deserved it, and that the Roman Catholics particularly, whose plea, you apprehended, might be urged, not only formerly, by their misconduct, and merited punishment, but that even now they maintained doctrines, incompatible with
the

the civil welfare of the realm. All this you did not say in *express* words; but you said it by *insinuations*, which have a worse impression on the mind. I had reason then to make the reflections, I have made; and I submit them to you.

It cannot, I am sure, be said that what I have advanced has the least tendency to generate the smallest spark of *new* animosity. I hope it has rather a tendency to stifle and suppress the *old*. But I have freely delivered my sentiments, and I thought myself authorised so to do. The spirit I wish to strengthen in my own mind, and to infuse into that of others, is the spirit of candour and of general benevolence; and I have the happiness to know, as I observed before, that it widely prevails among those of my persuasion. Our church, indeed, where it is *established*, is, in some kingdoms, supremely intolerant: and so is the Protestant church in this. Time will shew which church shall set the first example
of

of christian moderation. You and we, who have no establishment to maintain, and consequently can be influenced by no allurements of interest or honour, have little, it should seem to surmount, that can obstruct, in our own minds, the growth of the social passions. But if this little be not surmounted; what would have been the case, had more potent obstacles stood in our way? We have no prejudices against you, and we shall wish you success in any future attempts you may make for a redress of grievances, provided they be grounded on more generous principles than the last. A return of similar sentiments we have a right to expect from you: but more than this, you have sufficiently told us, not to look for. We can rest, God be praised! on the equity of our own cause, and we will not disparage that of others to promote it.*

* Dr. Priestly in his *Letter to Mr. Pitt*, just published, the spirit and general reasoning of which, I and every friend

friend to liberty must applaud, has observed p. 7. that had the maxims of the minister been adopted before the reformation, the nation had now been *Catholics, and without a shadow of a toleration*.—In the hurry of composition, did not the Doctor then reflect what has so recently been done for the Protestants in Germany; what is their present situation in France, and how much soon it will probably be eased? If any society of christians are now without a shadow of *legal* toleration, they are the Catholics of this *Protestant* state.—P. 43 is an observation which has been applied to us, though obviously never meant by the author. Speaking of the discountenance shewn by government to the Dissenters, he says, “at the same time that it takes into its bosom that part of the community, which was ever noted for its disloyalty.”—If government has taken *us* to its bosom it is with the kindness of the bear who presses his enemy to his breast, or with the caresses of a step-mother, smiling on the child of her husband. The history of the house of Stuart will tell our loyalty, and from them we have transferred it to the reigning family; but we were not of a humour *lightly* to quit an old master. The veering mind as it is never constant, so is it seldom sincere.

10 EE 58

OSCOTT, April 10, 1787.

T H E E N D.

